

John Carter and the Mount of Olympus

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Chapter One: The Man, the Mount, and the Mountain

I, John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, stood on the dead sea bottom, staring up toward the top of the red planet's biggest mountain, the behemoth that earthmen referred to as Olympus Mons. I could not see the top, since the mountain was so huge that its peak was beyond the horizon. I had tried to climb it once but was driven back by fierce winds, since that had been during the Olympus Monsoon season.

I felt a nudge at my side. It was my favorite thoot, signaling that he wanted another sugar cube from the precious but dwindling supply that I, his master, had brought back from my last translation to Jasoom.

"Here you go, big guy," I said, pulling one out of a pouch and letting the beast's huge tongue deftly lift it from my open palm. "You'll need the energy for the climb up this mountain," I told the beast.

Then, I had a new thought. "Am I, crazy?" I asked myself. "Why expend all the energy to climb this thing when I can just go back to Helium and check out a flier from the palace hangar?"

I leaped aboard my huge mount and spurred him forward, leaving a trail of red dust behind the thoot raced toward the capital city.

Chapter Two: The Lost Palace of the Gods

After I returned to Helium, I went to the palace where Dejah Thoris, the most beautiful woman in the Solar System awaited me. It has long been my habit to describe Dejah Thoris as the most beautiful woman on two worlds, but since my previous memoirs I have had the opportunity of journeying to every planet in our system, and so now I can truthfully state that she is the most beautiful woman in our Solar System, even easily eclipsing the beauty of Duare of Vepaja.

Before he died, I had mentioned to my dear nephew Edgar Rice Burroughs, that I had at last found the key to transporting myself at will across the cosmos. However, he passed away before he was able to write of any of my new adventures on those other worlds.

I found, though, that such feats of travel are particularly dangerous when attempting to transport to

other solar systems, since there is no way of knowing whether that system contains planets capable of bearing life. Thus, I have to be careful because, when I look up at the sky and see a star I am particularly attracted to, if I let myself feel the pull of that star I may well find myself on the surface of a planet that is in its earliest stages—completely covered in lava—and thus be in immediate danger for my life. In other instances, I may transport to a distant star and find myself upon a dead world with no air to breathe. In some cases it might be possible for me to swiftly transport myself right back to Mars, but in other cases, I might find myself submerged in the fires of a volcano and be instantly annihilated. And failing to take that care I am dead. At present I have not died, thus have managed to make these journeys successfully.

I believe anyone may attain this ability after they had lived as long as I, for I am a very old man. I have always been a man of about thirty as far as I can remember. My earliest memory, in fact, was under interesting circumstances. I recall sitting in the study of Benjamin Franklin, the famous founding father of America. Before me on the table was an empty flask, and I had a taste in my mouth as though I had just emptied it of some liquid, though I had lost all memory of the event.

Franklin then said to me: "It is an unfortunate side effect of the formula that you will lose all memory of your earlier existence. This is the reason that I myself have not taken the formula, for I do not wish to forget all the events that I have experienced in my varied career. But you are young, and I may assure you that you were a hero in the recent Revolutionary conflict, earning great valor on the field of battle. I should tell you that your name is John Carter, and you

are of the Carters of Virginia. Now, because of this formula, the span of your life will be greatly extended nearly to the indefinite limits, if my theories are correct. You may go now, but I hope that you will periodically check back so that I can keep a record of your aging processes."

I went from there with a fresh new mind—as blank as a baby—but I soon managed to earn a living as a career officer in the military. After that Franklin passed away I was unable to learn anything further about my unusual condition. Some day I suppose I shall die at last; but I am a great procrastinator in that regard.

When Dejah Thoris learned of my plan to soar to the heights of Olympus Mons, her adventurous spirit prompted her to insist on accompanying me.

And thus we began.

As the flier sped above the dead sea bottoms, my dear wife approached me. Her fingers caressed the dark curls on my close-cropped head. I covered her lips with kisses as the flier sped on its toward its goal of the great mountain. With my left hand I set the controls on automatic pilot and then turned my attention fully toward my wife. She ran her hands around the bulging sternocleidomastoids and trapezius of my powerful shoulders.

"You have such a broad back, John Carter! Umm!" she murmured in my arms.

"I hope," I replied, "there is only one such man you love in this way."

She smiled into my eyes.

Suddenly from the corner of my eye I saw the mountain approaching due to the rapidity of our flight—indicating an immediate collision. I quickly pulled the controls up and barely missed the top peaks. We then climbed uneventfully to the top, circled around and

landed in a strange city that had been built there in the crater of the mountain's volcanic cone.

"Who are you strangers?" cried a booming voice, that sounded human but was so loud it could only have come from some kind of amplification.

I leaped from the flier and saw a giant coming toward me across the courtyard. He was perfectly formed, wearing a golden tunic, with blue eyes and curly blond hair. He reminded me of something I recall from the legends of earth.

"I am John Carter, Warlord of Mars—but who are you that live so high on this mountain?"

"My name is Apollo, a God of Olympus," he replied. "We have come to this planet from the earth, where the cosmic principalities from the east drove us from our home during the time of Constantine Caesar. Now we have found this mountain and seek for new worshippers."

I laughed. "You have come to the right planet," I exclaimed, "for I am afraid I have done the awful deed of destroying all the gods who these people falsely held to be sacred."

"Then perhaps they will need beings like us to look up to and watch over them," replied Apollo.

"I am willing to put in a good word for you, for I loved you all as long as I can remember," I replied. "I have read all the ancient Greek myths—a favorite pastime. We welcome you to Mars, Apollo, and we shall bring you to Helium for a grand celebration. The disenfranchised priests will all rejoice that they have a new religion to nurture and foist upon of the people of Barsoom."

Apollo escorted us in to meet the other Olympians. All twelve gave us a warm reception, even great Jupiter himself. Dejah and I feasted on ambrosia and

nectar which, it is said, will enable a being to live forever. Since Franklin had already given me a longevity formula and Dejah's natural lifespan is 1,000 years, the food was doubly invigorating to our bodies.

After dinner I taught Apollo the rules and strategy for Jetan—Martian chess—and by the second game he was able to beat me. Mythology indicated Apollo's godlike consciousness could master any art with great speed, and so it was in reality.

Apollo then played the lyre so beautifully that it brought tears to the eyes of Dejah Thoris. Later we went to our chamber and slept on the softest bed I have ever had the privilege to lie upon. As I fell asleep, I had the dreamy feeling that this was the start of something big for Barsoom.

Chapter 3: Mars of Barsoom

I had already passed into the deepest of dreamy slumbers when I was shaken violently awake. Yet, for all that, it was all I could do to slowly regain my consciousness.

My eyes opened. I beheld a giant armored warrior attempting to rouse me. I felt like a dead log, unable to escape from the sleep upon me. I shook my head and threw off the strange trance I was in. The massive form above me I recognized as Mars, the god of war—the god of my vocation upon whom I called on that Arizona night many years ago to reach out to the planet Mars and be suddenly and instantly transported across the vast gulf to the planet of my destiny.

"Awaken, warrior! Jupiter has put you into a deep sleep until dawn," Mars shouted. "You must come with me, for the chastity of your princess is at stake."

I glanced to my side and saw that she was missing from her side of our bed. This worked as a stimulant to enable me to leap up and throw on my harness. I then followed him quickly out into the hall.

We passed rapidly down the silent corridors. I asked Mars what kind of danger awaited Dejah Thoris.

"She is in danger of the infatuation of Jupiter," he replied. "She is the most beautiful woman on Mars or Earth, and he is determined she shall be the mother of the greatest heroes this planet has known—the Hercules of Mars.

"But I will not let it happen," he continued. "On this world, he may still be the king of the gods, but it is my son who shall be the greatest hero of Mars. He has put your Dejah under his spell, so that she believes she has gone for a moonlight stroll with you, her chieftain. He has disguised himself as you, John Carter, so that no one would ever know."

My first impulse, I must admit, was suspicion. Why would another of the gods help me in such a circumstance? In addition, I had little hope that my trustworthy sword would be of much aid in fighting Jupiter himself.

We came at last to the private study of the king of the gods. The hand of Mars held me for a moment.

"Before you go in, you will need this," he said, producing from his long scarlet cloak a gigantic sickle. He handed it to me.

"Only with such a weapon could a mortal hope to threaten a god," he said. Thus saying, he thrust me into the chamber.

To my horror I saw a simulacra of me with Dejah in his arms and she breathlessly ready to respond to his lovemaking.

"What treachery is this?" I cried.

The impostor rose. The veil of his disguise fell away as he rose to his full height, proportionate with the colossal chamber.

"You have awakened to your doom!" he cried. Angrily he stepped toward his quiver of thunderbolts.

"Wait!" I shouted, moving forward menacingly, brandishing the massive sickle that had destroyed gods and demons. At this, Jupiter hesitated, and at that moment, Mars appeared in the doorway, as if he had just arrived.

"Sire, is there some trouble? I wandered the halls and heard some commotion," he said.

Jupiter turned from us with a low curse, and went to the vast window that overlooked the entire planet. There he stood brooding, staring out, his fist clenched under his chin.

Mars motioned Dejah, struggling from her spell, to come to us. He pushed us out the door. His voice darkened.

"If the mortals have offended you, *Father*, I will exile them from Mons Olympus immediately," said the god of war.

Jupiter adjusted his robe, concealing his arousal, but did not move from the bed. He scowled, sulking. Unsuccessful in his scheme Jupiter wished to avoid a scene that might reach the ears of Juno.

"Leave me," Jupiter said, and turned his back.

Mars immediately led us to the courtyard where our flier was anchored. "Do not concern yourselves about the gods, John Carter," he said. "We have made ourselves known to Argon, the city-state that lies near the base of this mountain. There the flower of religion has begun to bloom anew on this barren world."

Mars took from me the sickle of the gods. "Do not attempt to return here again. If you come here again,

you will find an empty crater without atmosphere and a freezing temperature. If you ever wish to speak to me, go to Argon. Speak through my priest there. I give you this gift in parting so that you may both know this was no mere dream."

He handed me a large golden ring with a shimmering red ruby-like stone. I thanked him and pressed my hand into his.

Dejah and I climbed aboard our craft. We silently took off, and made our way straight back to Helium. We spoke of the adventure to no one.

I did make inquiries with certain local scholars about the unknown inscription inside the ring, which appeared to be Greek.

As it turned out, this inscription revealed to me at last a great clue concerning my strange, mystical summons to Mars. Because the scholars of Barsoom have been studying the earth through super-powerful telescopes for many years, he had in one of his books a dictionary of Greek. He translated the inscription as follows:

"TO MY SON"